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Classified By: PRT Anbar Team Leader James Soriano for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This is a PRT Anbar reporting cable.

[1](#)2. (C) Summary. The six members of the recently-established Anbar Higher Committee (AHC) visited Bagdad January 15-16 in their first engagement as a group with senior GOI officials. The proximate reason was to follow up on unfulfilled GOI commitments made at last September's Anbar Forum II. Progress on the two top priorities, fuel and electricity supply, was disappointing, but Governor Ma'amoun was pleased to get greater authority over the Anbar police budget. The group made calls on President Talabani and VP Hashimi. Another key topic was Anbari concerns over Shia designs to expand Karbala provincial boundaries at the expense of Anbar. Although AHC is still working to formalize its own ground rules, the Anbaris made a concerted effort to act as a unified front to increase leverage vis--vis the GOI. End Summary.

First Outing

[1](#)3. (C) In its first engagement as a group with high-ranking GOI officials, the recently formed Anbar Higher Committee (Ref A) traveled to Baghdad January 15-16 to press for GOI economic support. The group met with President Jalal Talabani, Vice President Tariq Al-Hashimi, Deputy PM Barham Saleh, and at least two Cabinet ministers.

[1](#)4. (C) The proximate reason for the visit was to review progress on GOI economic commitments made at last September's Anbar Forum II in Ramadi, which was chaired by the DPM. The AHC met with the DPM at his residence on January 15, where they also had discussions with Finance Minister Bayan Jabr and Electricity Minister Abdul Kareem Waheed. Dr. Barham invited the group to stay overnight at GOI guest quarters so that appointments could be arranged the following day with Talabani and for follow on discussions.

A Conflict Resolution Mechanism

[1](#)5. (C) Six Anbari political figures formed the AHC last month as a conflict-resolution mechanism, prompted by renewed pressure from Sheikh Ahmad Abu Risha's Iraq Awakening Movement, or Sahawa Al-Iraq (SAI, see reftels). As Anbar transitions into the post-conflict period, squabbles are on the rise over the control of financial resources and patronage. In a bid to wrest more power for itself, the SAI turned up the heat in November when it boycotted the Provincial Council and called for the ouster of the Iraqi

Islamic Party's (IIP) Abdulsalam as that body's chairman.

Top Priorities

¶6. (C) The AHC went into the January 15 meeting with two top priorities in mind) increasing the supplies of fuel and electricity to the province. They walked away with numerous promises, but disappointing tangible commitments.

¶7. (C) The key issue on fuel was to reach consensus on transporting crude from the Bayji refinery in Salah Al-Din Province to Anbar's now-idle K-3 refinery near Haditha. Work on restarting one column at K-3 is well underway, but there is no GOI plan to supply it with crude. The Anbaris advocate delivering Bayji crude by rail and were looking for GOI support for that plan. However, Oil Minister Shahrastani was not available to meet with them and no meaningful decisions were reached. In his stead, was the DG for Distribution, who tentatively committed to a variety of measures, provided they get ministerial approval. Governor Ma'amoun later signaled his desire to return to Baghdad to meet jointly with the Ministers of Oil and Transportation on an agreed method for supplying K-3 with crude.

¶8. (C) Electricity Minister Waheed made several apparent commitments, the most important of which was a promise to select "within a week" one of two contractors to install French-made generators at the Tahadi power station near Haditha. Ma'amoun was skeptical about Waheed's other commitments, which included examining the possibility of importing electricity from Syria and Waheed's own visit to the power station at the Haditha Dam. Pointing to the Tahadi contract as the only meaningful initiative, Ma'amoun dismissed the other proposals as merely talk.

The DPM and the Economic Zone

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¶9. (C) Barham Saleh raised the issue of moving forward with studies for proposed Economic Zones (EZ) near the Syrian and Jordanian borders. The initiative is not a high Anbari priority, but is worthy of study. A decision was reached to hold an Anbari-GOI-CF meeting in Ramadi in the near future to discuss varying approaches for the EZs and to seek a unified way ahead. Barham opined that the EZs would stimulate trade with Syria and Jordan.

The Police Budget

¶10. (C) One unexpected result of the meeting was Finance Minister Jabr's decision to devolve control of the police budget to the province. At one point, Ma'amoun complained to Jabr that the Interior Ministry's centralized system of management cripples Anbar's police force. Accordingly, that budget is dribbled out to the province throughout the year in small amounts, which are replenished when the funds are spent. This frequently leads to the curtailment of police operations -- police cruisers sit idle for lack of fuel, e.g.) whenever there is a temporary lapse in the funding stream.

¶11. (C) Ma'amoun argued that management of the police budget should be his responsibility as the province's chief executive officer. Jabr agreed. The two met again on Jan. 16, when Jabr provided Ma'amoun a copy of his order authorizing the transfer of Anbar's police budget to the provincial treasury.

Meetings with Talabani and Hashimi

¶12. (C) The AHC called on President Talabani and VP Hashimi

on January 16. There was no CF presence, but both Ma'amoun and PC Chairman Abdulsalam later told us that the issue of the provincial district of Nukhayb, a desert oasis town 120 miles south of Ramadi, figured in the discussions. The Anbaris have long been concerned by encroachments by Karbala and Najaf police into the Nukhayb area, as well as by the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq's intention to re-adjust the Anbar-Karbala boundary within the context of the Article 140 process. Talabani invited Ma'amoun and AHC member Sheikh Ahmad Abu Risha to return to Baghdad to discuss Nukhayb in greater detail. (Note: When Ma'amoun returned on January 19, Talabani unexpectedly declined to meet. End Note)

Comment

¶13. (C) Several weeks after its establishment, it remains to be seen whether the AHC will live up to its billing; that is, whether it will actually mitigate political pressures on the local scene. During the visit to Baghdad, the AHC held an organizational meeting to discuss its own ground rules and to reinforce the need for local unity in the post-conflict period. At this stage, it is not clear whether Sheikh Ahmad can be kept on board as a team player, or if he will succumb to pressures within his own SAI to re-escalate power-sharing demands on the Provincial Council. Nor is it clear if the AHC itself will pass muster with other tribal sheikhs who are not among its members. One outsider, a city mayor, criticized the AHC for being set up without wide consultation with other local figures. In the words of one AHC member, the body is admittedly "plastic surgery," an inelegant attempt to channel Anbari energies onto a constructive path. Still, it made a fine effort at promoting provincial interests in its January 15-16 visit to Baghdad. End Comment.

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